

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6409

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 1829

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, HO

SUBJECT: THE FESITRANH CONVENTION

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1475

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE NORTH COAST LABOR FEDERATION (FESITRANH) HELD ITS BIENNIAL ELECTIVE CONVENTION IN SAN PEDRO SULA FROM APRIL 16-18. AS EXPECTED, THE CONVENTION BECAME A MAJOR BATTLE BETWEEN THE DEMOCRATICALLY-CONTROLLED UNIONS AND THOSE LED BY THE COMMUNISTS. AFTER LOSING TWO KEY VOTES, NINETEEN COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNIONS WALKED OUT OF THE CONVENTION AND ARE THREATENING TO FORM THEIR OWN FEDERATION. THE DEMOCRATIC SLATE FROM THE UNION BOARD, HEADED BY LONG-TIME FESITRANH PRESIDENT CELEO GONZALEZ, WAS ELECTED TO HEAD THE UNION FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS.
END SUMMARY.

1. FESITRANH HELD ITS BIENNIAL ELECTIVE CONVENTION IN SAN PEDRO SULA OVER THE WEEKEND OF APRIL 16-18. THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF THE CONVENTION WERE COMPLETELY TAKEN UP WITH A HEATED DEBATE BETWEEN THE DEMOCRATICALLY-CONTROLLED AND COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNIONS ON QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE SEATING OF TWO DELEGATIONS. THE FIRST ISSUE RELATED TO WHETHER THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HONDURAN CAMPESINOS (ANACH) WAS ENTITLED TO TEN DELEGATES
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OR TWO AS IN PREVIOUS CONVENTIONS. THE COMMUNIST UNIONS OPPOSED THE SEATING OF ANACH WITH MORE THAN TWO DELEGATES. IN PREVIOUS YEARS, ANACH HAD NOT PAID DUES TO FESITRANH AND HAD BEEN ALLOTTED THE TWO DELEGATES AS A COURTESY. HOWEVER, ANACH HAS RECENTLY BEGUN PAYING DUES FOR APPROXIMATELY TEN PERCENT OF ITS MEMBERSHIP, ENTITLING IT TO TEN DELEGATES UNDER FESITRANH RULES. THE COMMUNIST OPPOSITION WAS CAUSED BY THE

FACT THAT ANACH WOULD VOTE WITH THE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY. AFTER A PROLONGED DEBATE, A VOTE WAS TAKEN WITHOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF EITHER THE ANACH OR SUTRASFCO (STANDARD FRUIT COMPANY WORKERS' UNION) DELEGATIONS, WHICH THE DEMOCRATIC UNIONS WON BY AN AMPLE MARGIN, THUS SEATING THE TEN ANACH DELEGATES.

2. THE SECOND CREDENTIALS ISSUE INVOLVED THE TWO OPPOSING DELEGATIONS REPRESENTING SUTRASFCO, ON REPRESENTING THE NEW BOARD RECENTLY RECOGNIZED BY THE LABOR MINISTRY AND THE OTHER HEADED BY OUSTED SUTRASFCO PRESIDENT NAPOLEON ACEVEDO. (SEE REFTTEL) WHEN IT BECAME APPARENT THAT THE CONVENTION WOULD AT LEAST TACITLY RECOGNIZE THE NEW DEMOCRATIC DELEGATION, NINETEEN COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNIONS WALKED OUT OF THE CONVENTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH INSTRUCTIONS RECEIVED FROM THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF HONDURAS (PCH). THE CONVENTION THEN VOTED TO INCLUDE THE DEMOCRATIC SUTRASFCO. THIS HAD BEEN A PLANNED TACTICAL MOVE BY GONZALEZ TO AVOID SPLITTING THE CONVENTION.

3. THE GROUP OF UNIONS OUT OF THE CONVENTION WAS LED BY THE DELEGATION OF SITRATERCO (UNITED BRANDS WORKERS' UNION), WHICH IS GONZALEZ' HOME UNION. THE SITRATERCO DELEGATION WAS HEADED BY SITRATERCO BOARD MEMBERS JORGE MORALES AND RIGOBERTO LUNA, BOTH MEMBERS OF THE PCH. SITRATERCO PRESIDENT LUIS THIEBAUD, THE ONLY NON-PCH MEMBER ON THE SITRATERCO BOARD, WAS NOT ON THE DELEGATION BY HIS OWN CHOICE AS HE WAS SUPPORTING THE GONZALEZ SLATE FOR THE FESITRANH BOARD AND THE COMMUNIST UNIONS HAD HOPED TO USE HIM TO OPPOSE GONZALEZ, A MOVE WHICH HE OPPOSED. THE NINETEEN COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNIONS THEN

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CAUCUSED IN ANOTHER PART OF SAN PEDRO SULA, ELECTED A PROVISIONAL BOARD HEADED BY MORALES AND HAVE PUBLICLY DISCUSSED THE POSSIBILITY OF FORMING THEIR OWN FEDERATION. SUCH A MOVE IS OPPOSED BY THE PCH CENTRAL COMMITTEE, BUT THE PCH IS UNCERTAIN AS TO WHETHER THEY CAN CONTROL SOME OF THE RADICALS WITHIN THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNIONS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 1829

4. THE FINAL DAY OF THE CONVENTION WAS A SIXTEEN-HOUR MARATHON COVERING THE ENTIRE AGENDA FOR THE CONVENTION, EXCLUDING AN ANALYSIS OF THE "NATIONAL SITUATION." THE NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS WAS ELECTED ON SUNDAY MORNING AND WAS HEADED BY CELEO GONZALEZ AS PRESIDENT. THE OTHER MEMBERS ARE:
ARCADIO CABALLERO - VICE PRESIDENT
SAUL MARTINEZ GUZMAN - SECRETARY GENERAL
RAUL MEJIA - RECORDING SECRETARY
MIGUEL ROBERTO SUAZO - TREASURER
JAIME CACERES - FISCAL
ENRIQUE LOPEZ COELLO - SECRETARY FOR COOPERATIVES
ANTONIO JULIN MENDEZ - SECRETARY FOR CAMPESINOS
LETICIA MEJIA DE REYES - SECRETARY FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

5. WHILE THE ORIGINAL PLAN OF THE GONZALEZ-LED DEMOCRATIC FORCES HAD BEEN TO RETAIN PREVIOUS SECRETARY GENERAL ADOLFO CASTILLO IN HIS POSITION IN THE FACE OF INTENSE COMMUNIST OPPOSITION TO HIM, IT WAS DECIDED FOLLOWING THE COMMUNIST WALKOUT TO REPLACE HIM WITH MARTINEZ GUZMAN WHO WAS MORE ACCEPTABLE TO THE COMMUNISTS. CASTILLO AGREED WITH THE MOVE ON THE BASIS THAT IT WOULD MAKE REAPPROACHMENT WITH THE COMMUNIST DISSIDENTS MORE FEASIBLE. CACERES WAS PLACED ON THE BOARD BY GONZALEZ TO HEAD OFF A POTENTIAL SPLIT WITH THE TRANSPORT WORKERS' UNIONS.
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6. ALL MEMBERS OF BOTH THE PREVIOUS AND CURRENT FESITRANH BOARDS HAVE PUBLICLY CALLED FOR A DIALOGUE WITH THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNIONS IN AN ATTEMPT TO AVOID A SPLIT WITHIN THE LABOR MOVEMENT. GONZALEZ HAS PARTICULARLY APPEALED TO THE SITRATERCO MEMBERSHIP TO CAREFULLY CONSIDER ANY MOVE TO WITHDRAW THAT UNION FROM FESITRANH AND HAS CLAIMED THIEBAUD'S SUPPORT IN THAT EFFORT.

7. BEGIN COMMENT: THE FESITRANH CONVENTION WAS A VICTORY FOR THE DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION OF CELEO GONZALEZ' POLITICAL SKILLS. IT

CURRENTLY SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNIONS WILL SET UP THEIR OWN FEDERATION. NOT ONLY IS SUCH A MOVE OPPOSED BY THE PCH, BUT IT WOULD ALSO FACE FORMIDABLE LEGAL AND TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES. IT CAN ALSO BE EXPECTED THAT THE CURRENT LABMIN WOULD NOT LOOK FAVORABLE ON SUCH A MOVE. FURTHER, THIEBAUD'S SUPPORT FOR GONZALEX WITHIN SITRATERCO, AS WELL AS RESIDEUAL SYMPATHY TOWARD FESITRANH WITHIN SITRATERCO AS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE FESITRANH, WILL COMPLICATE ANY ATTEMPT AT THE DISAFFILIATION OF SITRATERCO. WITHOUT THE PARTICIPTION OF SITRATERCO, A NEW FEDERATION OF COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNION WOULD BE EXTREMELY WEAK.

8. WHILE THE DEMOCRATS HAVE ONCE AGAIN TAKEN THE INITIATIVE WITHIN THE HONDURAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT, THE COMMUNISTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE THEIR ATTEMPTS TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE FESITRANH. GONZALEZ HAS INDICATED THAT THIS WILL BE HIS LAST TERM AS PRESIDENT OF FESITRANH AND THE LOSS OF HIS LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL SKILLS COULD GIVE THE COMMUNISTS AN OPENING IN THE FUTURE. AS WITH THE REST OF THE HONDURAS LABOR MOVEMENT, THE FESITRANH STILL LACKS AN ADEQUATE SECOND SCHELON OF LEADERSHIP. END COMMENT.

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